

BRIEFING BY AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER

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AMB. CROCKER: Hey good afternoon. I apologize for keeping you waiting. Today was the second round of U.S.-Iranian-Iraqi discussions focused on security and stability in Iraq.

You'll remember the first round was toward the end of May, the 28th I think. Today was the second. We and the Iranians came together today, as was the case in May, at the invitation of the Iraqi government. We met at the prime ministry. The prime minister welcomed us all and then left to chair a cabinet meeting. So from the Iraqi side, the delegation was headed by the foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari accompanied by the national security advisor, Dr. Muwafaq al-Rubaie and others.

As was the case in May, I headed the American team and my Iranian counterpart, Ambassador Kazemi Qomi, headed the Iranian team.

As was the case in May, the subject of these talks was security in Iraq. We made it clear that that is the agenda. There is not a broader agenda. This is not a forum to address other issues in the Iranian-US relationship.

As we had done previously, I laid out the principals that govern our relationship with Iraq, our support for the democratically elected government of Iraq and its efforts to establish security and stability throughout the country, our combined vision of an Iraq that is at peace, at home, and with its neighbors that is neither threatened by any outside power nor poses a threat to any outside power. The Iranians spoke in similar terms. This was welcomed by the Iraqis.

As was the case in May, we made the point that agreement on principal is important and the principal that both Iran and the United States support a democratic stable Iraq. The test and the challenge is applying those principals on the ground. And to that end, we expressed concerns as we had in the past over Iranian activities in support of violent militia elements through both arming and training. We also discussed the issue of Al Qaeda, an enemy against whom both we and the Iraqi forces have been extensively engaged over the past number of weeks as the surge reaches its full force. And we noted that Al Qaeda is an enemy really to all three of us, to the United States, to Iraq, and to Iran.

We discussed ways forward and one of the issues were discussed was the formation of a security subcommittee that would address at an expert or technical level some issues relating to security- be that support to violent militias, Al Qaeda, or border security and will be working to try to establish what that kind of committee might look like. What its

composition would be. What its level would be. How it might function to actually get at in a productive way some of the security challenges that Iraq faces.

We did have lunch. That's one of the reasons I kept you waiting. It was hosted by the foreign minister at the prime minister's office and then we continued on until just a little bit ago.

So that's in broad summation kind of what the day was like. I would be happy to take your questions. Yes.

Q Ambassador Jamie from National Public Radio. Are you more optimistic coming out of today's meetings, which on for significantly longer than the last time the three parties were in the same room, considering what has happened in the space in between those meetings and we were talking about the military briefings about the information that you have about Iran's involvement in these attacks against coalition troops?

AMB. CROCKER: Well the fact is, as we made very clear in today's talks, that over the roughly two months since our last meeting we've actually seen militia related activity that can be attributed to Iranian support go up and not down. And you all have seen in the MNF briefings the detail we have on that and the evidence that supports it.

So I was as clear as I could be with the Iranians that this effort, this discussion has to be measured in results not in principals or promises and that thus far the results on the ground are not encouraging.

Q What is your feeling about the meeting? Did he get positive or negative results?

AMB. CROCKER: Well the discussions were as we say full and frank. We made very clear our concerns. The Iranians were there to express their own views.

When there are results, the results that count, they will be results we see on the ground. That's what the measure is here. And rather clearly we haven't seen those kinds of results thus far.

If the Iranian's are serious in trying to deal with these issues, a security subcommittee affords them the mechanism to begin taking different kinds of actions here.

But once again I would say even more than most types of discussions like this, you don't really have to watch the body language or the lengths of the meeting to discern the results. This one will be pretty clear. It'll be whether security conditions on the ground get better or not.

Q In the first meeting with the Iranian ambassador, you said that you were going to wait what will happen on the ground. Since the two months that went by, have you felt

that there is an Iranian intention or a work Iranian action that they are supporting the government of Iraq and the spokesperson of the foreign ministry of Iranian support to militias are vein accusations without any real basis. This is what we want to hear you about and there are proposals from Iran that have come to you concerning Iraq.

AMB. CROCKER: You've got a few questions in there.

On the first, which is are we seeing on the ground results? As I said earlier, thus far what we've been seeing on the ground over the last couple of months has in many respects represented and escalation not a de-escalation.

In the response to the second part of your question, comments from the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman, we have laid out what is clear to us as evidence of Iranian support for some of these militia activities. And again, for us, it is a very clear case. We have individuals in custody who have spoken of Iranian involvement. We have the evidence of weapons and ammunition captured on the ground that most of you have seen at least the pictures of.

There is no question in our mind that this support is going on. It's not something we are trying to or need to prove in a court of law. We made it clear to the Iranians that we know what they're doing. It's up to them to decide what they want to do about it because a point we have made previously is that Iran's stated policy of, you know, support for a stable democratic Iraq is not only consistent with U.S. policy. It makes sense in terms of Iran's own interests. No people have suffered greater harm under Saddam Hussein than the Iraqis themselves but second only to the Iraqis are the Iranians. That vicious eight year war that Saddam launched against them has to be something no Iranian will ever forget.

So it certainly seems to us that their stated policy makes sense in terms of their national interests. Our concern is their practices on the ground are running against that policy, against Iraq's interest as well as the coalition.

So if this dialogue affords them the opportunity to bring their practice in to line with policy, it will be a good thing.

Q Concerning the security committee are there details concerning this committee? When does it start? Who are the members? Thank you.

AMB. CROCKER: With respect to the security subcommittee, its membership, when it will meet, these are things we're gonna have to work out- ourselves, the Iranians and the Iraqis. Again the level of the composition and the timing we'll all have to sort through that in the coming days. We did make clear that we would like to see such a mechanism get established as soon as possible.

Okay. Oh, yeah, I do have some control over this.

Q. From your basically your statement today, most of it was as we said in May and as we did in May and over the two months that followed the activities that you say Iranian support increased. If the next two months show that same activity, do these meetings end? Does this relationship end?

Well obviously we're gonna take this as it goes and make evaluations sort of based on circumstances. Again the two months since May have not exactly been encouraging. At the same time, it's our view that we should not summarily abandon the process at this early stage. If the Iranians are interested in lining up practice with policy, we want to give that a chance and we also want to do everything we can to support the Iraqis who also want to see this process lead to some results.

So I can't really predict into the future when or under what conditions we would make different judgments. We'll pursue this as long as we think its got some prospect of leading to better results on the ground.

Q Ambassador what was, did you lay out any specific evidence to backup what you said the Iranians have been doing, helping the militia and so on? What was their reaction to you telling them that and what did they want from you?

AMB. CROCKER: As I said earlier, we're not in a position where we feel we need to produce the evidence to try a case in a court of law. What we did want to do is indicate pretty clearly to the Iranians that we know what is going on.

And today indeed we presented examples of that. The Iranian's, in their response, followed pretty much the same line as the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman that your colleague alluded to earlier, which is to say we have absolutely nothing to do with this.

At the same time, they did indicate they are prepared in a security subcommittee to discuss the problem of extremist militias.

So we'll see what they're prepared to bring to the table and again more importantly what they might be prepared to do on the ground.

With respect to what the Iranian's want, there was an awful lot of discussion today on political frameworks for discussion and so forth that none of which seemed to me terribly relevant. What is important is to try to get on with the serious dialogue on security in very frank terms focusing on what can be done to make security in Iraq better. Not to go off along various extraneous political lines of inquiry.

So again, you can go through hours of discussion and find at the end of it that the actual concrete results maybe distilled into a discussion of some few minutes, pretty much as I've done with you. Okay.

Q Ambassador, do you think that the intervention in Iraqi affairs from Iran, don't you think other countries who are sending money, who are issuing [not audible]

legitimizing bloodshed among Americans? Also there are statements from the COR members that it is a problem between Iranian intervention and U.S. occupation. Thank you.

AMB. CROCKER: Opinions on part of the counsel of representatives one of the great things about Iraq in 2007 is that there is a democratically elected counsel of representatives in which members are absolutely free to say whatever in on their mind much like other independently elected legislative bodies and that's just what people are doing here in Iraq. And it's another reminder with all the problems Iraq faces how 2007 is a world of difference to Iraq prior to 2003.

Naturally we would talk a different view. Coalition forces, of course, are here at the invitation of the Iraqi government and they are here in accordance with a UN Security Counsel Resolution. That bears no resemblance whatsoever to the kind of support we have seen coming from Iran for illegal and extremists and militias that are fighting not only U.S. and coalition forces but they're all fighting against Iraq's own security forces.

So, again the difference in my eyes is just about as stark and complete as it could possibly be.

Thanks very much. I appreciate your patience.

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